

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

WORK STUDY/RELEASE PROGRAM GUIDELINES

**“PARTNERING
WITH YOU TO
BUILD A
BETTER
WORKPLACE”**



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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN (CDP)

- The Career Development plan is the first step required in the Work Study/Release Program process upon which an employee lists his/her educational and professional development goals.
- One original completed/signed copy is required. The CDP is only required once upon initial application for a specified Work Study/Release Program.
- Participation in and completion of a degree or certification program may take an employee multiple semesters or years to achieve.

ELIGIBILITY

- The program is available to all permanent full-time or part-time (working at least 50%) employees who have been in his/her current position for one year and have completed their probationary period with a "Satisfactory" status on their PEP.

WORK STUDY/RELEASE PROGRAM APPLICATION

- One original completed/signed application packet along with all required documentation must be submitted 30 days prior to course start date. (Front/back includes contact information, course schedule period dates and the estimated work study/release hours.)
- A new application is required for each new work study/release program session/course(s) that is required in order to complete a specified work study/release program.
- Please do not use acronyms on the application or supporting documentation.

OBLIGATED SERVICE AGREEMENT (OSA)

- The Obligated Service Agreement documents an employee's agreement with the DHMH to repay loaned work study/release time once a program has been completed. A program is complete once a degree or certificate has been earned.
- One original completed/signed copy along with other required documentation must be completed for each work study/release program session.

WORK STUDY/RELEASE ACADEMIC PROGRESS FORM

- This form is used to monitor an employee's academic progress and work performance.
- One completed/original signed copy along with all required documentation must be submitted prior to submitting an application for a new work study/release program session.

OBLIGATED SERVICE AGREEMENT SERVICE/CASH REPAYMENT TRACKING

- This form must be completed by the supervisor when the employee has completed their work study/release program and has earned a degree or certificate.
- One original completed/signed copy must be submitted on a quarterly basis.
- The obligated service repayment for one work study/release program must be completed prior to starting a new Career Development Plan and Work Study/Release Program.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORK STUDY/RELEASE GUIDELINES

The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH/Department) supports and encourages employees to continue their learning and educational experience throughout their careers in the Department. To assist qualified employees to reach and succeed in their professional or personal development goals, the Department's Work Study/Release Program provides employees with the opportunity to attend class during their regular work day for coursework that falls under the realm of DHMH functions. The hours loaned are obligated service that must be paid back to the DHMH in employment service. All Work Study/Release Program applications and supporting documentation must be submitted to and approved by the Training Services Division.

Acceptable educational programs include credit and non-credit courses leading to a certificate, internship, or degree. **All colleges and universities must be accredited by the U.S. Department of Education.** Courses may be taken on-site or online. Online courses that have specific start/end times qualify for the program. Any additional course(s) that may be required does not qualify. Asynchronous courses do not qualify for the program because these types of courses can be taken at anytime. Therefore, they can be taken while not at work. Work Study/Release hours must be utilized during your normal regular work day. Release time does not include study time. If only 1-4 hours of work study/release are required, you must return to work for the remainder of the day.

NOTE: The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene does not currently offer tuition reimbursement.

TIMEKEEPING, SALARY/BENEFITS, AND LEAVE

All work study/release hours and regular work hours must equal the employee's regular work schedule and **MUST NOT** exceed 20 (part-time) or 40 (full-time) hours. Work study/release time must be coded as **79** on each timesheet. A timekeeping grid report or copies of timesheets must be submitted at the completion of each work study/release program session. Additionally, an excel spreadsheet listing all time used for a specified period may be required upon request. Employees **MAY NOT** work overtime to compensate for time used during work study/release.

While participating in an approved Work Study/Release program, the employee is entitled to full salary and membership in the Retirement System and Employees Health Insurance Program. An employee will also continue to accumulate sick leave and annual leave. Sick time used during work study/release should be reported with the appropriate code; code 79 may not be used. Holidays, including floating holidays are administered normally and code 79 may not be used. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Employees must report for duty and resume normal work hours during all school recesses.

COSTS

The employee pays all expenses related to courses taken while participating in the Program. This includes tuition, fees, books, supplies, travel, and any additional costs.

PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Participation in the Work Study/Release Program does not guarantee a promotion but provides an educational experience and the opportunity for employees to enhance or strive for new and exciting careers.

WORK-STUDY/RELEASE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN

A **Career Development Plan** (CDP) is an understanding between an employee and his/her supervisor. The CDP is the **first** step in participating in the Work Study/Release program. It will list the employee's personal and professional development goals. The goals set can be short or long-term and will remain the same for a specific work study/release program. **If an educational focus changes within a specified work study/release program, a new plan must be submitted for review and approval.** Depending on the change, a new work study/release program application may be required.

The CDP must be submitted along with all required documentation. This includes documentation showing the sequence/listing of required courses needed to complete course requirements. The listing of the course requirements can be copied from the college/university catalog or developed with an academic advisor. Classes must be listed by course number and title, i.e., Math 101: Introduction to Algebra.

ELIGIBILITY FOR PARTICIPATION

All permanent full-time and part-time (working at least 50%) employees can apply for work study/release. In order to be considered for the program, one must have been employed in his/her current position for a minimum of one year. The employee must have a **satisfactory** rating on their PEP when the application is submitted, and must maintain this level until the work study/release program has been completed. The employee cannot be on probation.

Part-time participation in the Work Study/Release Program consists of release from work from 1-20 hours per week. Full-time participation in the Work Study/Release Program consists of 21 hours to a maximum of 40 hours of release per week. Full-time release only applies to a degree or certificate program that requires full-time student attendance and does not allow courses to be taken on a part-time basis. A full-time course load is generally a minimum of 12 credits per semester at the undergraduate level and a minimum of nine (9) credits per semester at the graduate level. **If full-time attendance is required, documentation from the educational facility must be submitted.**

Once approved for the program, the employee must adhere to all program guidelines. This includes timely submission of required forms, meeting deadlines, release time limits, meeting the grade requirement, continued satisfactory work performance and obligated service repayment.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Requests to participate in the Work Study/Release Program must be approved by an employee's supervisor. An employee **MAY NOT** be permitted to start program participation prior to submitting the Work Study/Release Program application to the Training Services Division for review and approval. Additionally, the program is **not retroactive**, meaning an employee cannot submit an application for a coursework session that had already begun or had been completed. Participation in the program will only occur for the courses applied for and approved in advance by the supervisor and the Training Services Division.

APPLICATION PROCESS – (CONTINUED)

Application packets must be submitted to the Training Services Division **NO LATER THAN 30 DAYS** prior to the beginning/start of the coursework session. If late acceptance or admission into a program is required by an educational facility, documentation from the facility on their letterhead must be provided.

Working directly with the Supervisor, the application package must be complete and include:

1. Career Development Plan - only required once for an initial Work Study/Release Program **unless the career focus changes.**
2. One (1) originally signed/dated Work Study/Release Program Application (DHMH ##) completed in full, including work study/release hours. **NOTE:** No course(s) can be listed on the schedule as TBA. Dates and times cannot be estimated.
3. One (1) original completed/signed Obligated Service Agreement (DHMH 4576)
4. A photocopy of the official catalogue course description(s) which includes course dates and times for the course(s) the employee will be taking.
5. Signed letter of support from supervisor on business letterhead.
6. Signed acceptance letter from educational institution or facility for specific program of study on their business letterhead. **NOTE:** Please ensure that the educational institution is accredited by the Maryland Department of Higher Learning or the U.S. Department of Education.

The employee must apply for each new work study/release program session/semester within an approved work/study release program and all required documentation must be included. However, a new CDP is not required. Subsequent work study/release applications must contain all the required documentation that was submitted for the original application along with the following items:

- Work Study Academic Progress Form along with all required information and documentation. This includes copies of official documentation listing the grades for each course taken.
- Timesheet grid report or timesheets for the previous work study/release session.

If for any reason, the educational facility requires an employee to register for a different course(s) other than what was approved for a specific Work Study/Release Program, **the employee must notify their supervisor in writing and must submit a new Work Study/Release application packet for their supervisor's approval and submission to the Training Services Division.** This should be done no later than two (2) weeks prior to the start of the new course(s). If there is a rare occasion where an employee requires extended study beyond an approved work study/release program, the employee must provide a written letter with supporting documentation from the educational facility explaining why an extension is required only if the employee will continue using work study/release time. **A new application packet may be required for the extended study.**

APPROVAL FOR WORK STUDY/RELEASE PROGRAM

The supervisor must ensure that the employee has been employed with the department for one year and has satisfactorily completed his/her probationary work period. Additionally, the employee must have and maintain a satisfactory Performance Evaluation status at the initial application and subsequent applications during a specific work study/release program.

NOTE: Administrations/units **cannot administer the Work Study/Release Program on their own.** All application requests must be submitted to the Training Services Division for final review and approval.

Although the Supervisor has the authority to approve participation in the Work Study/Release program, the **agreement only becomes effective once the employee receives the approved documentation from the Training Services Division.** If any discrepancies are found, the Training Services Division will work with the employee, supervisor or training coordinator to rectify them. Copies of the Work Study/Release Program Application and the Obligated Service agreement will be signed and returned to the administration. A copy must be given to the employee and one must be placed in the employee's file.

Courses that are listed as **TBA** (*To be Announced*) will not be approved. Therefore, the employee must provide a schedule listing the dates and times of all coursework at the time the application is submitted. Once a schedule has been approved, it cannot be changed after the employee has already started coursework unless the institution/facility makes a change.

DISAPPROVAL FOR WORK STUDY/RELEASE PROGRAM

There may be occasions when program participation is denied by the supervisor and/or TSD. These may include:

- Probationary period not completed
- Unsatisfactory PEP rating
- No Career Development Plan submitted
- Late submission (submitted past deadline/after the course(s) has started)
- Documentation lacks required signatures and dates
- Business need in department requiring attendance

If an employee's supervisor does not approve program participation, he/she **must provide a letter of denial** to the employee within 10 days of submission. A copy of the letter must be sent to the Training Services Division within 15 days.

After a specific work study/release program has been completed and degree or certificate has been earned, **the required obligated service for that specific program must be repaid prior to applying to participate in a new program.**

OBLIGATED SERVICE AGREEMENT

Employees are required to enter into an obligated service agreement in order to participate in the program. The agreement states that the salary received while participating in a Work Study/Release program is a loaned salary paid by the DHMH. The agreement is a legally binding document upon which the employee agrees to repay the DHMH in obligated service hours at the rate that applies. Repayment begins only when a specific work study/release program has been completed and a degree or certificate has been earned.

Service hour repayment **starts on the first day the employee returns to full-time work status** and will continue until there is a zero balance. If an employee has to take **leave without pay**, that time **must not** be counted as service hour repayment.

If an employee moves to another DHMH administration before repaying the full amount of service, the employee will continue to repay service hours until there is a \$0 balance. The current supervisor will be responsible for providing the Training Services Division with the employee's new administration and the supervisor's contact information. If an employee leaves the DHMH service but returns to the DHMH service within three (3) years, the cash repayment will cease and the service hours will begin until there is a \$0 balance owed to the State. The employee is responsible for informing their supervisor regarding their return to service and will only receive credit once the Training Service Division has been informed. No cash payments will be returned to the employee in exchange for future service.

If an employee resigns, retires or is terminated from the DHMH before completing their obligated service agreement, he/she will have to pay the State the "unpaid" balance of the "loan" in cash until there is a \$0 balance. If a position is abolished or if an employee leaves at no fault of their own, the obligated service is considered to be satisfied. If cash payments are required, the employee will work directly with the Department's Accounting office.

If an employee experiences unforeseen personal hardship, he/she can **ONLY** be released from the obligated service agreement by the DHMH Secretary. In order to be considered for release from repayment obligations, a letter detailing the hardship, along with supporting documentation, must also be submitted to the Training Services Division. A letter from the DHMH Secretary detailing approval or denial of the request will be sent to the employee and the administration.

TIMEKEEPING CONVERSION PROCESS

The amount of obligated service hours or cash repayment is a combined total of approved work study/release time used from the start through the end of an employee's work study/release program upon which an employee has earned a degree, completed an internship (related to coursework) or certification. The total hours will be calculated based on a timekeeping conversion as follows:

- Release time up to 10 hours per week = hour per hour payback
- Release time 11 hours through 20 hours per week = 1.5 times per hour payback
- Release time 21 hours through 40 hours per week = 3 times per hour payback

NOTE: If you attend a class on a state holiday or state release day **ONLY**, do not code it as 79. Use the holiday or state release code. This does not include your own use of annual, personal or comp time used for your personal leave.

FORMULA/HOURS

- A. Work Study/Release Hours per week = _____
- B. Number of Weeks Covered = _____
- C. $A \times B =$ _____ total number of hours taken
- D. $C \times \text{Conversion Amount} =$ _____ hours of Obligated Service repayment required for this Semester/Course

CASH: Based on the information that the Training Services Division provides, the DHMH Accounting Department will determine the required cash repayment amount.

ACADEMIC PROGRESS PROCESS

The **employee's supervisor** is responsible for monitoring his/her academic progress and work status. The **Work Study/Release Academic Progress** form is used to record an employee's progress. The form must be completed and submitted to the Training Services Division after each course, semester, or internship completion. The form is required in order to continue participation in the program. Additionally, an official copy/transcript of grade reports and the number of courses and credits that were completed must be included for review and recording purposes. **Copies of a timekeeping grid report or all timesheets submitted during the work study/release session must be included with the packet.**

The supervisor may discontinue an employee's work study/release program if, after a reasonable review, the employee is not making satisfactory academic progress (based on GPA and/or the number of credits completed), the employee's job performance has significantly deteriorated to an unsatisfactory level, his/her history routinely shows a pattern of incomplete courses, course changes, or grades are below a "C" average. If an employee experiences any serious problems on the job that would warrant discontinuing the Work Study/Release program, this must be reported in writing to the TSD immediately.

Once a specified Work Study/Release program has been completed and a degree, certificate or internship has been earned, a Final Work Study/Release Academic Progress form must be completed and submitted to the Training Services Division along with all required documentation.

OBLIGATED SERVICE REPAYMENT TRACKING

An Obligated Service Agreement Service Repayment Tracking form is used to record repayment of obligated service hours. It must be completed and submitted by the employee's supervisor on a quarterly basis after the employee has returned to full-time work status. A completed original and signed copy of the form must be submitted to the Training Services Division on a quarterly basis (by the 10th of the month) until the obligation has been satisfied. A copy of each form must be provided to the employee and one must be retained in the employee's personnel file. If an employee moves to another DHMH administration or leaves DHMH service for any reason, the Training Services Division must be notified immediately.

GROUND FORS FOR AUTOMATIC WITHDRAWAL

An employee may be subject to automatic withdrawal/dismissal from the program if they do not adhere to all program guidelines. If an employee is withdrawn or dismissed from the program he/she is still bound to repay loaned work study/release obligated service via service time or cash and must begin repayment immediately. If the employee leaves DHMH service, they must repay in cash based on the required amount.

Reasons For Automatic Withdrawal Are As Follows But Are Not Limited To:

- Failure to maintain a C grade level for each semester.
- Work performance deteriorates. Failure to maintain satisfactory performance level.
- Dropped courses without a valid reason and without proper notification.
- Falsifying work and/or work study/release hours.
- Students with a history of dropping out of courses will be considered "at risk", and may not be approved for work study/release in the future.

The employee must advise their supervisor in writing **within five (5) days** if a course is dropped or if he/she withdraws from the program. A copy of the letter must be placed in the employee's personnel file and a copy of the letter must be sent to the Training Services Division **within 10 days**.

FILE RETENTION

All work study/release program applications and related documentation must be placed in the employee's personnel file. If the employee moves to another DHMH position, copies of the documentation must be forwarded to the new administration. All work study/release program documentation must be retained in the respective office of employment until the service or cash obligation has been completed. The respective office and the Training Services Division must retain the documentation for an additional two years once the service or cash obligation has been completed. At the end of the two year period, the documentation must be sent to the State off-site storage facility to be retained for an additional five years.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The State of Maryland offers a variety of financial aid programs for individuals who would like to further their education. Visit the Maryland Higher Education Commission's website at <http://www.mhec.state.md.us/financialAid/descriptions.asp> to obtain more information regarding opportunities that you may qualify for such as grants, student loans, parent loans, scholarships or other opportunities.

